

Open forum

Benefits and challenges of the immersive realities

Impact on Human rights, rule of law and democracy

The Metaverse is a virtual world that blurs the distinctions between digital and physical space, and which has the potential to revolutionise how individuals interact with each other and the world. Among already known metaverse-like spaces one can mention Second Life, Decentraland, Roblox, and Minecraft.

Compared to the digital space as we know it so far, the Metaverse, with its potential for (almost) total immersion in an alternative universe creates multitude of opportunities. It may provide individualized learning opportunities, improve efficiency of medical interventions, test architectural solutions prior investing in building them, enrich gaming experience, just to mention few.

Equally, it comes with a whole host of questions about its governance, the place for rule of law and human rights and related safeguards in the virtual reality. The right to privacy, freedom of expression, right to intellectual property, consumer protection may be challenged in the Metaverse applications. Their accessibility also may cause issues with equality among society members.

The Council of Europe has made a priority from addressing the challenges posed by the digital space. It does so with Conventions such as the one on Cybercrime, or Data Protection and is currently working on a framework convention on AI and human rights. The Metaverse is a different technology that has already captured the attention of the various thematic sectors of the Organisation.

The Council of Europe Digital Agenda 2022-2025 points to the Metaverse as a development raising multiple and complex challenges, and therefore requiring particular attention from the Organization: *Far beyond our computers, smartphones and connected watches, every object would seem to have a vocation to interface, through the so-called "Internet of Things" with the deployment of 5G. New immersive experiences, like Metaverse, will play an increasing role in our lives and already shape the future of the internet. The massive investments of the large digital companies in that domain will make these virtual universes concrete, within which we will find the issues that we already know about the internet multiplied.*

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Objectives:

- Introduction to the Metaverse/immersive potential and industry perspective;
- Presentation of benefits and challenges to the human rights, rule of law and democracy;
- Presentation of the joint Report Council of Europe - IEEE;
- Reflection whether existing tools are sufficient to address the challenges posed by immersive realities or whether more is needed.

Expected outcomes:

- Increase awareness and understanding of the potential of the Metaverse and impact on societies and individuals;
- Understanding the role that Council of Europe and other stakeholders can play on this complex subject matter in the future.